TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE GOVERNMENT, LABOR, ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

HB 52 Election Law - Incarcerated Individuals - Voter Hotline and Voting Eligibility (Voting Rights for All Act)

Position – Support

BY: Linda T. Kohn, President

Date: February 11, 2026

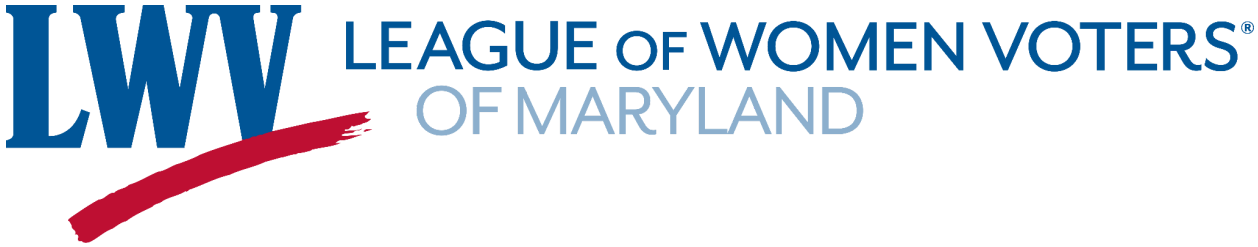
The League of Women Voters of Maryland believes that voting is a fundamental citizen right that must be guaranteed. Elections should produce representation that reflects community sentiment and is feasible to implement. The League also supports a criminal justice system that is just, effective, equitable, and transparent, and that fosters public trust at all stages.

House Bill 52, the Voting Rights for All Act, expands voting access by establishing a voter hotline for incarcerated individuals and allowing people with felony convictions who are currently serving to vote.

According to the Sentencing Project, more than 16,000 Marylanders are currently disenfranchised due to criminal convictions in Maryland. This means that 16,000 people are not eligible to vote and, therefore, have no voice in democracy. Without this voice, they have no say in how their communities, locally and on a state level, are impacted. They do not get to vote on who will be on the Board of Education of their children's school districts or who will represent them at any level of government.

We know that when more people are able to vote and express themselves, the more robust and representative our democracy becomes. We also know that closing the door on people who have or should have the right to vote limits who elected officials are actually representing. Enfranchising those currently serving felony convictions is just good democracy. Voting, or losing the vote, should not be used as a punitive measure.

For years, League members and leaders have been going into jails and prisons and encouraging voter registration and participation from those who are eligible under current law. Every time they do, they are met with interest and desire to participate more fully in our democracy. Maryland is actively barring people from voting and not permitting them to participate in society as a whole. Leaders in justice reform would tell you that the more these individuals are able to participate in society, the more invested they become and the less likely they are to re-offend. While voting may seem like a small action to take for so many, it is not for those who are not allowed to do it.



Beyond that, HB 52 would streamline and create a universal system for all facilities to implement voting. Right now, in some places, there is some confusion and a lack of will to engage incarcerated people to vote. If HB 52 were to pass, it would institute a voter hotline and more concrete processes.

Those incarcerated generally do not have convenient access to the necessary forms and instructions to register to vote or apply for a mail-in ballot, nor do they have an easy way to obtain detailed information about candidates or ballot questions. Because voter education is one of the League's foundational principles for elections, our local Leagues spent considerable time and energy delivering our nonpartisan voting information.

The simple fact is that ending the current practice of disenfranchisement based on a person's conviction would eliminate all the work, errors, and costs associated with having some in jails and prisons who can vote and others who can not. The League has witnessed the confusion among eligible voters and agencies that would be eliminated should universal voting be the law of Maryland.

The League of Women Voters of Maryland, representing members all across Maryland, urges a favorable report on HB 52.